

## Aspects of the German Language and German Language Policy. A research note.

著者	Schmidt Maria Gabriela
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# **Aspects of the German Language and German Language Policy. A research note.**

Maria Gabriela Schmidt

To write an article about the German language and German language policy is quite difficult. One reason is that German as a language is not representative for one single country. Another reason is that there are no really new data concerning the German language. Therefore, I would like to elaborate on the given data some new aspects, highlighting to some extent a hidden German language policy. On this background I will introduce a new approach to German language policy with two aspects: from inside, comparing the data of language decisionmaking countries where German is an official language and from outside, how the German language is used by these countries to interact internationally. Both aspects – inside and outside – are related and will show interdependent.

## **1. Aspects of the German Language**

As an official language German is spoken nowadays in Germany, Austria, partly in Switzerland and to some extent in Luxembourg and Belgium. German is a minority language in Italy (Südtirol), and in use near the neighboring countries of Denmark, The Netherlands, France, and Hungary. Outside this territory there have been recognized minorities of German origin, keeping old dialects of German as indigenous language like in Romania (Siebenbürgen), in Russia (Russland-Deutsche) and in the USA in Pennsylvania. Therefore German is a pluri-centric language with several language varieties.

### **1.1. German as a standard language**

For German as an official language there is no codified standard version as a written or spoken language at all. Thus, what is taught in school as a mother-tongue or as German as a Foreign Language? There is an unconfirmed consent about “German language”, but it has never been officially ratified by any political commission or institution. And moreover there is a mostly regional diversity, too, with no means of any stigma or social implications. So German language is pluri-centric and has at least

3 standardized varieties: one in Germany, one in Austria, and one in Switzerland, with mainly lexical variations.

### 1.2. Accepting two and more forms

There is a tendency for the modern German language to accept more than one form as correct. In these cases it is not possible to decide one form the right one or wrong one and both are acceptable. This can be seen not only on the lexical level. See the following examples (1) to (9):

#### *Lexical varieties*

- (1) "saturday" – 'Samstag' or 'Sonnabend' (Berlin area)
- (2) "orange" – 'Orange' or 'Apfelsine'
- (3) "January" – 'Januar' (Germany) or 'Jänner' (Austria)

#### *Intonation and pronunciation*

- (4) "restaurant" – 'restaurant' (Germany) – 'reschtaur<sup>h</sup>ant' (Switzerland)
- (5) "king" – 'König' (-iç northern Germany) or 'König' (-ik southern Germany, Austria, Switzerland)

#### *Syntactical varieties*

- (6) "yoghurt" – 'der Joghurt' or 'das Joghurt' (every noun in German has a "gender" with a corresponding article);
- (7) "I have swum" – 'ich bin geschwommen' or 'ich habe geschwommen' ;

#### *Spelling*

- (8) „great" – 'groß' (Germany, Austria) or 'gross' (Switzerland)
- (9) "expensive, extravagant" – 'aufwändig' or 'aufwendig'

These examples show the diversity within the language for all linguistic levels of German. They are related mainly to an area, but not always. Some are related to the history of German language.

### 1.3. Co-operation in language commissions

The three countries Germany, Austria and Switzerland, with counselors from the other countries using German, build commissions for special issues concerning the German language, like the orthographical reform (*Rechtschreibreform*) for standardizing the spelling of the German language. This issue had been long discussed and has been a social, educational and political topic for more than ten years and is still growing.

Example (9) refers to the outcome of the so called *Rechtschreibreform*. In some cases the opposition from teachers, parents, ordinary people, and politicians (especially in Germany) against the decisions of the linguistic experts was so strong that it had not been possible to plot a consent. As a result it is now allowed to write either “aufwändig” or “aufwendig” (expensive, extravagant). So the outcome of the *Rechtschreibreform* has fostered recently the tendency of the German language to accept more than one form as correct. For some Germans it is very hard to realize that there might be no real standard, either written or spoken. This development of the German language is to some extent the opposite to the stereotype of German seriousness.

#### 1.4. Correct spelling – correct pronunciation

Many people using German as a mother-tongue are not sure if their spelling is right or wrong, but they want to write and use their language properly. Whom to turn to having doubts? To fulfill these needs for the correct spelling there are two main publishers in Germany known for their thorough studies on German dictionaries:

- the well-known Dudenverlag in Mannheim
- and in recent time more and more Wahrig now in Gütersloh.

Besides these two, there are non-profit organizations dealing with the needs, like Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sprache in Wiesbaden.

To get information about the correct pronunciation is more difficult than for the spelling (cf. König, Hove, Takahashi). Some reference sources are:

- Siebs (1969) with two standard varieties of pronunciation (Hochlautung): a “clean “ and a “moderate “,
- Duden (1974 onwards, West-Germany) *Aussprache* compiled by Max Mangold,
- Wörterbuch der deutschen Aussprache (1964 and 1982, East-Germany) and
- König *Atlas* (1989), who made a comparative survey.

There are two institutions for linguistic research on the modern German language, the “Institut für Deutsche Sprache (IDS), Mannheim” and the “Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft, Typologie und Universalienforschung (ZAS), Berlin”. But both focus on linguistic description and research only.

Summarizing the discussed issues from inside the German language, it seems to me that not deciding nor finding one normative solution for the German language is

linguistically as well as politically an unspoken, but a real language policy. In Europe there are several examples for different behavior concerning the national languages. France in contrary decided to ask the *Academie Française* to find the right French. There are different ways of making politics and different political strategies to deal with languages.

## 2. Aspects of German Language Policy

In recent studies Germany has been criticized for being reluctant concerning the role of the German language and its use in the EU. In countries like Japan or South-Korea where the German language was for almost 100 years very popular competing with English and French, scholars of German Language and Literature ask loudly why Germany does not have a stronger grip on its language. German as a mother-tongue is spoken in more than 5 countries, the most spoken language in Europe (almost 100 million people). Many scholars in Germany, too, are uttering their disapproval of the German government and its language policy. They fear that German may loose its identity to English in a more and more globalizing world (cf. Ammon, Jesse, Stark, Zimmer).

### 2.1. Inside and Outside: Language Policies on German

First, I would like to ask: Does Germany have a language policy at all? And what kind of language policy is it? The time frame considered is Germany in the past 60 years, after World War II. So we have to distinguish West-Germany and East-Germany and the unified Germany. Second, we have to consider that “German” as a language is not related to one single country. Therefore, there might be different German language policies.

To approach this complex issue the first step will be to collect data on decisions made on the wide range of language policy concerning German and to apply it to the countries where German is used as an official language. I would like to divide the “language policy decisions” into an “inside policy” and an “outside policy” as follows:

- “inside policy” means inside the country in the following categories: education, culture, law and politics, society, persons or the language itself. For example, questions related to language in schools as a mothertongue, teaching foreign languages, in court etc.
- “outside policy” means actions related to other countries, going outside of the

country: the EU, German as a Foreign Language, public sponsoring of language and cultural institutes etc.

The list below is a first attempt, yet not well detailed and documented for the above mentioned categories. This will be one of the main tasks to get an overview on possible language policies on the German language. In the final stage there will be more categories and every argument will be proven:

Country	Inside policy		Outside policy
	categories: <i>education, culture, law, politics, society, persons, language itself, political correctness</i> and decision-making:		<i>cooperation, EWG, EU German as a Foreign Language</i>
<b>West-Germany:</b> German	law: political correctness:	choosing names Jenninger-Rede	Goethe-Institut EWG
Federal 11 states: (Bundesländer)			
<b>East-Germany:</b> German, Sorbisch	law  education	research and protection of the minority language Wörterbuch der Aussprache	Herder-Institut
<b>unified Germany</b> German, Sorbisch	law:  education:	immigration (language tests) "Pisa Schock"	Austria, Switzerland: Orthographical Reform EU
Federal 16 states (Bundesländer) Nordrhein-Westfalen:	not accepted by all states: law:	orthographical reform; language testing and training for immigrant-children in kindergarten	
<b>Austria:</b> German			Germany, Switzerland: Orthographical Reform EU
<b>Switzerland:</b> (German & Switzerdytsch, French, Italian, Rätoroman)			Austria, Germany: Orthographical Reform not EU
<b>Luxembourg:</b> Letzeburgisch (French, German)	Letzeburgisch has became the official language		EU
<b>Belgium:</b>	German minority wants to be integrated more.		EU
<b>Neighbouring countries:</b> Italy, The Netherlands ...	minorities		EU

The data will allow comparing the language policies for every country from above, using German as an official language or partially as an official language. So we will be able to discuss on a broader range if Germany has had a language policy in the last 60 years of its own and to which extent considering the federal constitution of the country. In my opinion the discussion in recent years has been very emotional and there has been little research on a comparative base like suggested here. I hope my studies will contribute to a more diversified discussion.

## 2.2. Outside: Language-Policy with the EU

One example for an outside language policy of unified Germany is the role of Germany in the EU. Germany is supporting completely the educational and cultural policies of the European Union and tries to fit in as one of the many, not stressing too much its own language and culture. This strategy can already be seen in the German *Grundgesetz* (constitution-like) from 1949 which mentions neither German nor any other language. Language is mentioned in the *Grundgesetz* only once in article 3(3), dealing with the equality of everybody concerning the law regardless of language, which conform to Article 14 of the Convention of Human Rights. The freedom of speech (Article 5) is guaranteed, too, along with the freedom of religion (Article 4).

In the process of the unification of the European Union (EU) one central issue was that people should be able to move freely inside the EU for professional and educational reasons. The Treaty on European Union stresses literally the cultural and linguistic diversity throughout the member states and the mobility (Treaty of Maastricht 1992, Chapter 3 'Education, vocational training and youth', Article 126, 127 ). This has been confirmed and specified in the meetings of Amsterdam, last in Nice 2000.

In 2001 – the European Year of Languages – the Council of Europe launched the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) to promote mobility throughout the EU, learning languages and a wider range of cultural understanding. The CEFR was established to help everybody, not only teachers, to evaluate the knowledge achieved studying a language, and to compare the achievements. The concept is that people studying languages are able to use the language and to act as competent independent persons in the European societies. A very important issue of the CEFR is the transparency for people studying foreign languages. They should be self-aware of the lifelong process of learning languages.

In Japan the reception has been initiated by teachers of Japanese in Europe

(Japanese as a Foreign Language). It has been translated into Japanese in 2004 by Yoshijima Shigeru and Oohashi Rie (外国語の学習、教授、評価のためのヨーロッパ共通参照枠 *gaikokugo no gakushuu, kyouju, hyouka no tame no yooroppa kyoutsuu sansyou waku*). The implications of the CEFR have been discussed and used for projects on all educational levels in Japan.

Although the CEFR has gone through a long process of bottom up and top down decisions for more than 30 years, it has been mainly compiled by intensive discussions of scholars throughout Europe in the 1990s, including Germany taking part in transnational programs.

### 3. Conclusion

There is a language policy in Germany concerning the German language itself, not taking action and allowing two forms or more to be accepted as correct in written and spoken language. This tendency is growing. Implicitly, it is a language policy, even if it is not expressed clearly by law or sanctioned through official decisions. And there may be more language policies hidden, which should be verified by collected data and be compared with other countries. On the outside, Germany has a focus not to stress its own language and culture to fit in the policies of the EU, participating in such decisions like the CEFR.

In forthcoming studies these inside and outside perspectives, linguistic and political aspects of German language policies should be discussed in more detail. More categories from inside Germany concerning the education, political correctness and others have to be considered and included in the discussion, too. This will diversify the discussion on German language policy.

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